State Mission
A Federal Gain

Every day is M-Day in the National Guard. Every day, somewhere in the United States, the call goes out from a State capital, summoning Guardsmen and Guardswomen from their homes, schools, or places of business to cope with a disaster or other crisis. They aren’t going into combat in its traditional context, but many of the elements of combat are present when Guardsmen deal with floods, blizzards, tornadoes, forest fires, explosions, civil disorders and the like. There are the elements of peril and of hardship, for example, along with the need for teamwork, close coordination, and central command and control. The Guard’s greatest advantage, in such a situation, is the fact that it is a disciplined force working under central direction, focusing all its resources, thoughts and energies on a single “enemy” and a single task.

Not least of the demands the State mission imposes on individual Guardsmen is the ability to make an instant mental transition, from the workaday world to a world of crisis and hazard.

Statistics help tell the story. In the first 90 days of 1978 there were 88 calling of Guard elements, an average of more than one a day. In them, 20,107 Guardsmen and Guardswomen were placed on State active duty for periods ranging from a few days to several weeks. Thousands more were placed on standby alerts in the same period, ready to respond if a situation worsened.

Services rendered by the Guard vary widely in nature and scope. Typifying one end of the scale was January and early February, when thousands of Guardsmen were ordered to duty in 21 States in the nation’s northeastern quadrant during a series of serious snowstorms. On the other end of Scale were the floods that caused damage early in March in the Phoenix and Los Angeles areas, bringing hundreds of Guardsmen to duty for brief but exhausting efforts (See “The State Mission” elsewhere in this issue). In Indiana, Guardsmen performed security duties for a lengthy period during the coal strike.

And of lesser magnitude (though not so less serious, indeed) was the episode in North Carolina where four Guardsmen and their generator provided emergency power to two State prisons that had suffered power outages.

There are two areas of significance in this dual mission pattern that need to be reiterated frequently. The first is the importance of the State’s Guard, for no man and no machine or structure, for that matter, there’s no segment of the military establishment that delivers more service and more protection per dollar to American taxpayers than the National Guard.

The second it the role of the Reserve Component that carries this dual responsibility, to its States as well as to the Federal government.

Anytime you can control, train, equip and administer a single group of tax-paid people, like Guardsmen, so that they can provide capable service for America and its citizens are the gainers. And that is the system that’s represented in the National Guard.

It performs an absolutely essential military role. Concurrently, it functions uniquely as the backup force that augments civil authorities in the States.

It wasn’t many years ago that Pentagon officials were reluctant to assign much value to the Guard’s State mission while dealing with such matters as reserve component fund allocations and budgets. They didn’t deny the need for such services; they simply didn’t think State needs should influence military plans, budget allocations. The turmoil and civil unrest of the Sixties tended to alter such attitudes, however, and we hope the change is permanent.

There was an alarming sign a few weeks ago when Harold Chase, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs, travelled to Indianapolis to pay an official visit to Indiana Guardsmen. “Governor Bowen is head of the National Governor’s Association committee that keeps tabs on National Guard needs and problems. The visit was intended to start a process of consultation in advance of some ongoing studies that may lead to Department of Defense proposals for changes in the Guard/Reserve. We hope most sincerely it signals the beginning of a new era of consultation between DoD and the States, instead of the periodic confrontations and controversies that have marked the State/Defense relationship so often in the past,” wrote the article.

We think it also is significant that each State callup propels Guard unit, commanders, staffs and Guard members into crisis-and-conflict situation. The callups are real and serious, and they provide a valuable by-product in that they serve as dry runs for the mobilization that a national emergency would bring. Beyond that, they give commanders and staffs working experience in leadership, in the learning and planning responsibilities that would be theirs in a purely military operation.

The Guard’s State mission improves its ability to perform its military mission, and the reverse is true as well. Governor Bowen recently put his finger on it when he said during a NATIONAL GUARDSMAN interview: “The real beauty of the system is that so much of the training the Guard undergoes is ready for a possible Federal mission and that keeps it primed for a strong showing in its secondary (State) mission.”

In our view, then, it’s a clear case of everybody wins — the defense establishment, the States, and taxpaying Americans!

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In many localities, citizens with a sense of history remember the military tradition in ceremonial units dating back to colonial era.

Guard/Reserve Pay Due for Overhaul?
Reserve Compensation System Study produces bulke report that’s bound to provide round of controversy in reserve forces.

The State Mission
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Maj Gen Richard A. Miller
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Cover: Members of Rhode Island’s Artillery Company of Newport fire a 1798 brass cannon. Beginning on page two, James B. Deenin describes many such units dedicated to preserving the traditions of the militia.

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